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**A Comparative Study of Fear in Richard Wright's Bigger Thomas,  
Ann Petry's Mrs. Lutie Johnson, and Willard Motley's Nick  
Romano**

Ada L. Hembra Washington

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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF FEAR IN RICHARD WRIGHT'S BIGGER  
THOMAS, ANN PETRY'S MRS. LUTIE JOHNSON, AND WILLARD  
MOTLEY'S NICK ROMANO



ADA L. HEMBRA WASHINGTON

1958



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BIGGER THOMAS, ANN PETRY'S MRS. LUTIE JOHNSON, AND  
WILLARD MOTLEY'S NICK ROMANO

By

Ada L. Hembra Washington

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

In The

Graduate Division

of

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1958

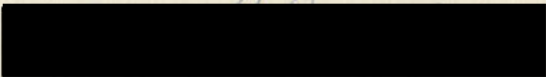
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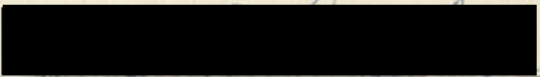
Prairie View, Texas

August, 1958

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WILLARD MOTLEY'S NICK ROMANO

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### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The writer wishes to express her gratitude to Dr. Anne L. Campbell, Head of the Department of English, Prairie View A. and M. College, for her sympathetic understanding and valuable criticism which have been of inestimable value in the development of this thesis.

To my devoted husband, Charles L. Washington, I wish to express my indebtedness for his encouragement which gave me inspiration to complete this study.

A.  
L.  
H.  
W.

### DEDICATION

The writer sincerely wishes to dedicate this thesis to the memory of her beloved and devoted mother, Mrs. Rosa A. Hembra, whose conscientious work, fervent prayer and sincere encouragement during her life paved the way and laid the foundation for this accomplishment.

A.  
L.  
H.  
W.



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## INTRODUCTION

One of the crucial problems found in the life of man is the concept of fear. The operation of fear on the mind is often, if uncorrected, attended with the most serious consequences. Fear will cause a man to feel weak and inferior; fear will cause a man to hate and become vile; while on the other hand, fear will cause one to play the role of a bravo. In many persons, the influences of fear are far more serious in its effect than the worst form of malady. Fear may disorganize one's activities so that he lacks effective motor coordination: it may drive him to extreme directions of activity that his cooler judgment would not have countenanced; it may also set up in him an enduring attitude that will intrude into many of his dealings with others. One can become master of himself when he learns to control fear. As the late President, Franklin D. Roosevelt very often stated, "There is nothing to fear but fear itself."

It was in the 1930's and the early 1940's that Franklin D. Roosevelt was president of the United States, a period during which fear seemed to be universal. Our economic and social life was threatened by poverty and distress. At this time there was a depression which caused



many people to be unemployed, and poverty could be found everywhere.

Trade recovery was painfully slow; and finance limped even more than did commerce. Currency brought no permanent advantage, for Nazi Germany and other countries went far beyond the United States in manipulation of exchange. While the good-will offensive did yield some return, one could not eliminate overnight the prejudices of generations. On top of that, countries that had been badly burned on Wall Street loans were reluctant to borrow further, either from financiers or from the Export-Import Bank. The reciprocal trade agreements worked but only within relatively narrow limits. For one thing the administration was reluctant to make far-reaching concessions, for fear of offending special interests.<sup>1</sup>

Insecurity caused fear in wage earners who are the majority of gainfully employed in our country. In this category of industrial hazards belong unemployment, industrial accidents, industrial disease and premature or industrial old age which made an increasing number of workers too old to be employed at the age of forty.

Amid these experiences, America was still menaced by the threat of war. Adolph Hitler, the great leader of Nazi Germany, was causing destruction in the East and was moving rapidly toward America. The United States was still

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<sup>1</sup>Merle Curti and Richard H. Shryock, Thomas Cochran and Fred H. Harrington, An American History (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1950), p. 558.

making preparations to avoid a second World War when the great shock came to the Americans, THE FALL OF PEARL HARBOR! The war had begun. The mobilization of more troops began, chemical research was advanced, air craft came into power, factories were operating day and night; men and women were employed thus putting depression in the background, but the fear for the salvation of our nation grew greater. All men were called to duty if not actual combat; laborers were needed to supply the needs of the people.

Conditions of depression inevitably resulted in a sudden change in our society during the latter thirties. Prior to Pearl Harbor industry was slack, wages were lower, and many people were thrown out of employment. Want and misery increased. History reveals<sup>2</sup> that these situations are apt to be followed by many petty thefts and robberies, and not infrequently by an increasing number of crimes of violence, that idleness, with its accompanying discontent, is always conducive to crime. However, when economic conditions are favorable, when there is plenty of work to be had at good wages, there is apt to be less crime than in periods of economic depression. Such was our economy

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<sup>2</sup>Ezra Thayer Towne, Social Problems (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1933), pp. 256-260.



following the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Fear caused by depression may be far removed during the period of prosperity, but fear caused by suppression will exist as long as suppression is a reality. Richard Wright and his contemporaries, Ann Petry and Willard Motley, lived and wrote during a period of predominant evidences of racial suppression and bigotry. The authors, themselves, relate personal experiences which account character delineations developed in their novels.

On the basis of these facts which research revealed the writer proposes to define and compare fear as it was found in three protagonists: Bigger Thomas in Richard Wright's Native Son; Mrs. Lutie Johnson in Ann Petry's The Street; Nick Romano in Willard Motley's Knock On Any Door.

The writer proposes to prove that the three characters, Bigger Thomas, Lutie Johnson, and Nick Romano, do not represent wholesome, well-adjusted personalities; that the weaknesses in these characters are due in the main, to various causes of fear which motivated the characters to strike out in violence against social pressures. An attempt will also be made to point out the physiological symptoms of fear which act psychologically upon each of the protagonists discussed in this thesis.

For the purpose of this study, the writer has defined concept of fear to be "an instance of emotion, emotion viewed with regard to one's reaction in social, economic and religious life: a state of alarm or dread, a dread of something that will or may happen in the future."<sup>3</sup> The writer will attempt to prove that the protagonists under discussion in this thesis were in a state of alarm and that their reactions in their social and economic life were evidences of fear.

This investigation is limited to three novels, Native Son, The Street, and Knock On Any Door, and a study of an analysis of the concept of fear found in only three characters, Bigger Thomas, Mrs. Lutie Johnson, Nick Romano, and the extent to which fear influenced these characters.

Examples in the novels, of fear and passages which show the cause and extent of fear, will be presented. The writer will show by comparative analysis, similarities, and differences in the expression of fear in Bigger Thomas, Mrs. Lutie Johnson, and Nick Romano how this fear shaped their lives.

It is important to know that from the experiences of the authors Richard Wright, Ann Petry, and Willard Motley,

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<sup>3</sup>Stanley J. Kunitz, Twentieth Century Dictionary (New York: The H. W. Wilson Company, 1955).



the protagonists, Bigger Thomas, Lutie Johnson, and Nick Romano, were created and influenced.

Edwin R. Embree has this to say about Wright:

From earliest life, Wright has been fascinated by the emotion of fear. He knew an excess of fright in his own life as a black boy in the Deep South. He watched fear turn men sometimes into cowards, sometimes into bullies. Fear runs through all of his stories.<sup>4</sup>

The fear found in Richard Wright is specifically related to and dependent upon the individual's experiences.

It seems that as a youth, Mr. Motley knew nothing of the fear of which he writes except through the experiences of other people with whom he worked or was associated. This fact is supported by the following comment:

Mr. Motley was raised in a middle class White neighborhood of Irish and German in Chicago. He did not write about Negroes because he knew Whites as well, and because he feels the Negro writer must not lose sight of other problems, the problems that underlie all human beings. And the novel was simply an attempt to show how criminals are made.<sup>5</sup>

It seems that Mr. Motley is more concerned with the basic problems that underlie all human beings rather than

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<sup>4</sup>Edwin R. Embree, 13 Against The Odds (New York: The Viking Press, 1944), p. 25.

<sup>5</sup>The New York Times Review, July 13, 1947.

those that concern the Negro only. One would assume that Motley's treatment of fear, as revealed in the protagonist, Nick Romano, would be strongly affected by the author's experiences. Ann Petry, like Motley, did not develop her protagonist out of her background of personal experiences, for Ann as a girl was carefully reared and educated. She gained her experiences and began writing for newspapers and magazines. Covering fires, political rallies and murders, she became familiar with Harlem's daily tragedies, its evil housing, its dismal family life.<sup>6</sup>

The writer hopes to establish the fact that though each of the writers uses a somewhat different approach to fear and that while in one instance, (Motley's Nick Romano) the racial identity of the protagonist differs, fear affects the characters in similar ways, regardless of racial identity. If socio-economic factors are equal, overt behavior motivated by fear has a thread of similarity in it. Therefore, the extent to which fear influences each protagonist will be a factor which influences this study.

On the assumption that a novelist reflects his own experiences and background in his writings, the writer in the first chapter proposes to give a detailed account of the social and economic background of each author.

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<sup>6</sup>Current Biography, March, 1946.



## CHAPTER I

### SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND OF THE AUTHORS OF NATIVE SON, THE STREET, AND KNOCK ON ANY DOOR

In simple childhood rests the origin of man's greatness, and men turn with various feelings to recollections of their own childhood and observations of child life about them. Some relive in memory the happy or unhappy, innocent pleasures or displeasures of their own lives when they have occasion to notice children; others take a realistic view of children and the circumstances of surroundings affecting them.<sup>1</sup>

The subject of the fears in children, both in the home and in the school, offers rich opportunity for important investigation. Fears may be checked or removed, but the mother in the home, and the teacher in the classroom must understand the child and the thing he fears before success in the removal of the child's fear can be obtained.

In the discussion, "Anxiety and the Personality," Burnham says:

Perhaps even more important than the more acute and definite fears of children in their influence

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<sup>1</sup>William H. Burnham, The Wholesome Personality (New York: A. Appleton-Century Company, 1932), pp. 291-329.

upon the health of the personality is the effect of the attitude of anxiety and the constant sense of insecurity, that results from speed and the atmosphere of hurry and criticism common in many modern classrooms. The effect of this and similar attitudes day after day on the developing mind of sensitive children at least seems sure to be injurious. It interferes with the wholesome mental metabolism that should continue during every day of life.<sup>2</sup>

To support this fact it seemed necessary to the writer to present observations and circumstances concerning the novelists discussed in this study.

Richard Wright, the son of Nathan and Ella Wright, was born in Natchez, Mississippi in 1908. Wright's background in Mississippi consisted of numerous effronteries to his personal dignities. He was a very inquisitive child and often was given a backhanded slap in the mouth for asking the question "why?" He not only wanted to know that a thing did exist or happen, but he wanted to know why it happened. A black boy had been beaten by a White man and Wright could not understand why. Wright's own statement verifies this:

A paternal right was the only right to my understanding, that a man had to beat a child. But when my mother told me that the "white" man was not the father of the "black" boy, was no kin

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<sup>2</sup>William H. Burnham, The Wholesome Personality (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1932), pp. 291-329.



to him at all, I was puzzled.<sup>3</sup>

Inquisitively but intelligently, Richard began to ask questions.

"Then why did the white man whip the black boy?" I asked my mother.

"The white man did not whip the black boy," my mother told me, "He beat the black boy."

"But why?" His mother's reply, "You're too young to know," only caused Little Richard to become more curious and fear white people whenever he saw them.<sup>4</sup>

Because no satisfactory explanation was given, Richard regarded the inexplicable as something to fear. Another incident which was an early identification with fear was that of burying the cat which Richard had killed. His mother forced him to bury it. Wright described his condition as one of great fear. Says he, "I stumbled into the black night, sobbing, my legs wobbly with fear."<sup>5</sup> Richard was afraid of the dead kitten, and afraid of the black night. After he had lowered the kitten, which he felt was staring at him with reproachful eyes, into the shallow grave, his mother forced him to repeat a prayer after her. This was the prayer.

Dear God, our Father, forgive me, for I knew not what I was doing. And spare my poor life, even

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<sup>4</sup>Richard Wright, Black Boy (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1945), p. 21.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

though I did not spare the life of the kitten.  
And while I sleep tonight, do not snatch the  
breath of life from me. . . . .<sup>6</sup>

Wright was so frozen with horror that he could not  
continue his prayer for he felt that he would die.

My mind was frozen with horror. . . . I  
broke away from my mother and ran into the night,  
crying, shaking with dread.<sup>7</sup>

His father deserted his mother and Wright was thrown  
on the streets. Therefore, he haunted saloons, and whiskey  
was forced on him so frequently that he became a drunkard  
by the time he was six years of age. To this fact Wright  
replied:

"I was a drunkard in my sixth year before  
I had begun school . . . . The point of my  
life became for me the time when I could beg  
drinks. My mother was in despair."<sup>8</sup>

From his own autobiography it seems logical to the  
writer to describe Wright's childhood as one of poverty,  
hunger, and a generous dose of brutality which rounded the  
picture of his youthful misery. After his father had

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 12.



deserted his mother, Wright was put in an orphan's home for guidance and support, provided his mother could make small payments. One morning his mother took him into the orphanage where Miss Simon, a tall, gaunt mulatto woman took fancy to him. Wright's reaction here was an outcome of his former experiences:

"I was frightened speechless. I was afraid of her the moment I saw her and my fear lasted during my entire stay in the home. . . . The most abiding feeling I had each day was hunger and fear.<sup>9</sup>

The home was crowded with noisy under-fed children. There was not much money, and the children were given only two meals each day. Just before they went to bed each night they were given a slice of bread smeared with molasses. This was more than Richard could stand and hatred for Miss Simon, the owner of the orphan home, grew greater each day; therefore, he decided to run away.

"I decided as soon as night came I would run away..... I opened the door and ran down the walk to the street. Dusk was falling. Doubt made me stop. Ought I go back? No, hunger was back there, and fear."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

Wright had not been away long before he realized that he was lost; hence, he began to cry. While he sat on the sidewalk a crowd began to gather around him. Finally a policeman came and questioned him.

"I am trying to find my mother".....His "white" face, (referring to the police), created a fear in me. "I was remembering the tale of the "white" man beating the "black" boy.....I was too full of fear to cry now."<sup>11</sup>

He, Wright, was taken back to the orphanage but in a few days his mother came with the news that they were going to live with her sister in Elaine, Arkansas, and on their way would stop off at Jackson to visit his grandmother. He did not know, however, that the experiences that he would have at granny's probably would be among his worst. His grandmother and her youngest daughter, Addie, were fanatical Seventh Day Adventists. His Aunt Addie had just finished a Seventh Day Adventist school in Huntsville, Alabama, and argued that Wright should attend a religious school rather than a secular one. Wright makes the following comment concerning this event in his life:

.....If the family was compassionate enough to feed me, then the least I could do in return was to follow its guidance. She proposed that,

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 28.



when the fall school term started that I should be enrolled in a religious school rather than a secular one.....The religious school opened and I put in my sullen attendance.<sup>12</sup>

Wright's Aunt Addie was the teacher of the school. He was not conditioned for attendance in a religious school and resented being there. His aunt, because of his attitude and previous experiences, probably resented his being there also. When she attempted to whip him for something which he felt was unfair, he resented. He was whipped by her at school, but he declared she would not whip him again about the same thing at home which she had promised to do. When evening came and she ordered him to the kitchen to give him another whipping, fear overcame him and a fight ensued:

She was upon me, lashing me across the face. I leaped, screaming, and ran past her, jerked open the kitchen drawer; it spilled to the floor with the thunderous sound. I grabbed up a knife and held it ready for her.<sup>13</sup>

Another of the many incidents of this kind is the one Wright recalls with his uncle. Wright was very frank in his speech and for this he was most always misunderstood. His Uncle Tom who had taught school in the country for thirty

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

years and who now was living in granny's home asked Richard:

"What time have you?"

I replied, "Eighteen past five."

"Now is that the right time?"

"It's right," I said, snuggling back down into my pillow. "If it's a little slow or fast, it's not far wrong."<sup>14</sup>

His uncle became furious and replied:

"This day I am going to give you a whipping some man should have given you long ago."<sup>15</sup>

Wright jumped out of bed and put on his clothes. He could not conceive the idea of having said anything wrong. Why should he be whipped? He felt that his uncle was just a stranger and had no right to impose a whipping on him. His uncle ordered him into the back yard.

"You are not going to whip me," I said.

"You shut that foul mouth of yours and get into the back yard," he snapped. He had not seen the razors in my hand....."I've got a razor in each hand!" I warned in a low, charged voice. "If you touch me, I'll cut you! Maybe I'll get cut too, but I'll cut you so help me God!"<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>17</sup>Richard Wright, "Bright Wall, Yellow Dawn", New York, March 5, 1945, p. 91.



This boy, a drunkard at the age of six, and before the age of sixteen, a man of the street armed with a kitchen knife and a razor, lived in his world of fear and hate and watched fear turn men sometimes into cowards, sometimes into bullies.

Because of his experiences on the street, Richard was isolated from playmates and friends. He lived in the home with his grandmother who was a Seventh Day Adventist. Her daughter who had been educated in a Seventh Day Adventist school was such a religious fanatic that this also caused Richard to become more isolated, as he was not conditioned for this type of environment. Richard was fifteen now and had to go to work before and after school to support himself. He wanted a good job, but no one ever told him of such jobs. His classmates told him of the good jobs they had found, but they never told him where to find one. He felt completely isolated as he had no association even with his classmates. His loneliness and isolation at this time are expressed in these lines:

I have no association with them: the religious home in which I lived, my mush-and-lard-gravy poverty had cut me off from the normal processes of black boys my own age.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Richard Wright, "Wright Tell of His Bitter Youth", Newsweek, March 5, 1945, p. 93.

At the age of seventeen, Wright graduated from the Jim Hill Public School in Jackson, Mississippi. He began to work hard in a Southern culture that he never understood nor did he accept. The formative years of a person's life are the most impressionable ones. In the light of this fact, the experiences of former years had so crystallized in the consciousness of Wright that the one persistent idea in his mind was to escape from the wrath, fear, and terror of the South. Hence, he moved to Nashville, Tennessee, and later to Chicago, Illinois, where he worked at many odd jobs. Sufficiently removed from the actual scene of his childhood days, he, nevertheless, bore the scars of his wounds. He could never forget the South, for there had been slowly instilled in his personality and consciousness the culture of the South.

Jobs were not so plentiful during the depression years of the thirties; therefore, Wright soon became a wanderer in search of work. During his wandering, Wright landed in New York farther away from his obscurities. In the following passage, the writer assumes that Wright means that in this new environment he hoped to improve his personality and security in such a way as to generate his ability to gain happiness and the fulfillment of his aspirations.

Wright, p. 94.

Wright, H. Wright, 12 Jackson St., 1941 (New York: Viking Press, 1941), p. 94.

Wright, p. 94.



"In leaving I was taking part of the South to plant in alien soil, to see if it could grow differently, if it could drink of new and cool rains, bend in strange winds, respond to the warmth of other suns, and perhaps, to bloom."<sup>18</sup>

Embree further observes that:

All of this man's life has been building toward this and the other books he will write. His biography is not a series of outward happenings born here, schooled there, holding this and that job. All of his living and thinking have gone into understanding how man-made forces playing upon a boy create him in their image.<sup>19</sup>

From earliest life, Wright was influenced by the concept of fear. In his autobiography he admits "At the age of twelve, before I had had one full year of formal schooling, I had a conception of life that no experience would ever erase."<sup>20</sup>

His father had deserted his family which caused years of distress and fear; by moving here and there, hunger was with him always. To sum up the impression made on the young mind, Wright states:

My mother's suffering grew into a symbol in my mind, gathering to itself all poverty, the ignorance, the helplessness; the painful, baffling,

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>19</sup>Edwin R. Embree, 13 Against the Odds (New York: The Viking Press, 1944), p. 25.

<sup>20</sup>Wright, op. cit., p. 60.

hunger-ridden days and hours; the restless moving, the futile seeking, the uncertainty, the fear, the dread; the meaningless pain and the endless pain and the endless suffering. Her life set the emotional tone to my life.<sup>21</sup>

To add to the fear in his young life he also stated:

A dread of white people now came to live permanently in my feelings and imagination. As the war drew to a close, racial conflict flared over the entire South, and though I did not witness any of it, I could not have been more thoroughly affected by it if I had participated directly in every clash.<sup>22</sup>

The writer has cited many childhood experiences of Wright's which caused fear and which fear has so conditioned him that even in a new environment he had to work with himself in order to improve his personality.

The one outstanding condition menacing the mental health of Richard Wright was the sense of insecurity which is substantiated by the phrase, "My mush-and-lard-gravy poverty;" and "the desire for social approval," which is shown in the following quotations-- "I have no association with them;".... "....."cut me off from the normal processes of black boys my own age....."23

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>23</sup>Wright, Newsweek, op. cit., p. 93.



Among his many experiences that likely produced situations which resulted in his being cut off from boys his own age were: (1) He had little home-training; he ran the streets; and, in his own words, "he was a drunkard at the age of six;" (2) because of poverty, he and his mother sought refuge in the home of his grandmother who was a fanatical Seventh Day Adventist; (3) he was not conditioned to live in a home under such extreme religious demands, and (4) most of the time, he was deserted and hungry, seeking not companionship but survival, knowing well how to protect himself with knife or razor if necessary.

At the age of twelve when he actually desired the companionship of boys his own age he was too matured, too uncultured and too retarded, that is, he knew too much for a boy his age; he had not associated with cultured people and he had not attended school so that he could be classified with boys his own age. By the time that he realized that he was old enough to help himself and wanted a job; and most of all, help and approval from boys his own age, he was branded "a bad boy." He became very sensitive and was determined to improve his condition.

This situation caused many fear producing problems; the problem of overcoming poverty, the problem of leaving

the Deep South, the transition period from youth to manhood which is accompanied with a nervous mental condition in every youth. Wright became a wanderer during his adolescence thus causing more fear producing experiences. According to Burnham, in every youth there is some form of the emotion of fear. Says he:

At adolescence it seems well nigh universal. The great remedy for this fear is the attainment of scientific attitude, together with the insight that in any case one's task is worth doing. By the scientific method, truth and a knowledge of reality can be obtained.<sup>24</sup>

Evidently, Wright realized that truth and reality could be obtained. Therefore, research reveals that "after nearly three decades of tense living and three of travail in writing, Richard Wright published Native Son."<sup>25</sup>

The second writer whom the writer will treat is Ann Petry. Biographical data reveal that Ann Petry was nurtured under the guidance of her parents in their home where she was born October 12, 1911, in Old Saybrook, Connecticut, and where she lived until she married and moved to New York. She was a member of the Congregational Church, and

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<sup>24</sup>William H. Burnham, The Wholesome Personality (New York: D. Appleton Century Company, 1932), p. 329.

<sup>25</sup>Embree, op. cit., pp. 24-46.



began writing for magazines and newspapers as a sideline which proved to be an asset in making contracts with many groups of people. Investigating the effects of segregation upon the minds of children, by participating in an educational experiment in the New York City Public Schools probably gave to her, for the first time, an insight into some of the experiences of segregated children which Richard Wright had known from birth.<sup>26</sup>

Ann Petry's writing for newspapers, collecting news by attending political rallies, fires, and visiting murder scenes caused her to go into many areas of the city where she, otherwise, never would have gone; therefore, giving her first hand information about the slums as they existed on 116th Street in New York City.

Mrs. Petry, with a background of culture and refinement, knew for the first time the real meaning of poverty, fear, anger, murder, and suppression. She viewed the dark, filthy, dilapidated old buildings that had been made into apartments. She visited scenes and saw murdered victims in the narrow streets of Harlem. This was her job as newspaper reporter, but, for her, not all. She had an urge to let the world know what caused these people to

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<sup>26</sup>Who's Who In Colored America, 1950, p. 576.

act, feel, and live as they did and explained that she wrote The Street as a medium of revealing the facts of her experiences.

"I wrote The Street in an effort to show why the Negro has a high crime rate, a high death rate, and little or no chance of keeping his family unit in tact in large northern cities."<sup>27</sup>

Ann Petry felt that until the meaning of those inhuman pressures and warping experiences is burned into the conscience of all America, the youth of 116th Street in New York City, or any slum in any city would be doomed. "To present her case, Petry creates a world which contains all of the elements of bitterness and eventual destruction on account of race relationship in America."<sup>28</sup>

Thus Petry began the work on her first novel, The Street, which is written out of a living and working experience of six years in New York's Harlem during the late thirties. She wrote during the years of depression; hence, her novel begins with the depression. "The novel is a cross-section of mental strain and distress that can be found in contemporary American life, of unhappy men and women, distraught lovers, and miserable children."<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup>Current Biography, 1946, p. 476.

<sup>28</sup>Carl Milton Hughes, Negro Novelists (New York: The Citadel Press, 1953), p. 87.

<sup>29</sup>Saturday Review of Literature, December 28, 1946, p. 16.



The writer in her research was not able to find any information revealing the fear emotions in Ann Petry as a child, but psychologists agree that all children have fears one kind or another.

Noteworthy studies made by Colin Scott and discussed by William Burnham showed that when children have overcome certain fears, the objects of their fear are likely to become objects of special interests. Thus fear may emerge not only as a destroyer, but also as a builder of personality.<sup>30</sup>

The writer assumes that as a newspaper reporter, investigator of fires, murders, robberies, and other crimes, Ann Petry observed enough instances of a dire nature to become fearful for others, as well as, for herself. While making investigations of these incidents, she could not help observing the filthy streets of Harlem, and the dark, dirty dilapidated old buildings which created an unwholesome environment unfit for human habitation.

During her vicarious experiences, Ann made tremendous discoveries, for she did not know until she became a newspaper reporter that such poverty existed as she found in Harlem. She knew nothing of the fear that existed

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<sup>30</sup>Burnham, op. cit., p. 323.

in men, women, and children caused by murder scenes; vice, filth, crowed, inadequate housing conditions and ignorance as she found in Harlem.

To substantiate this fact, Carl Milton Hughes has this to say about Ann Petry's discovery: "It is the street. A whirlwind blows angrily, bits of filth and refuse from opening doors into the street with abated fury. This is 116th Street and Seventh Avenue, New York City, where thousands of Negroes live in abominable apartments. Their common virtues are filth, dirt and stench."<sup>31</sup>

Investigation reveals that out of the many experiences which Ann Petry had as a newspaper reporter, as an investigator of social and economic conditions in the slums of Harlem, she wrote her first novel, The Street. Lutie Johnson, the protagonist, a product of the kind of environment that Petry had investigated was caught in the throes of violence, fear and frustration.

Harry Hansen of New York World Telegram remarked "The place is Harlem, and the victims are Negroes, but the situation is universal."<sup>32</sup> The writer interprets this statement to mean that in any slum area whether the victims

<sup>31</sup>Hughes, op. cit., p. 87.

<sup>32</sup>Current Biography, March, 1946, p. 476.



are Negroes or any other human beings, the situation in which they are thrown because of insecurity causes a multiplicity of crimes such as murder, gambling, drunkenness, profanity, adultery, and delinquency.

The third and youngest of the novelists whom the writer will treat is "Willard Motley who was born July 14, 1912, and reared in a lower middle-class White neighborhood of Irish and German families in Chicago, Illinois. He was educated in the public schools of Chicago and played football in the Englewood High School where he was known as 'The Little Iron Man.'<sup>33</sup>

From all indications, Motley grew up in a more wholesome environment than did Wright but did not grow up in the atmosphere of culture as did Ann Petry. Research did not reveal any accounts of Motley having ever been taught to fear white men nor of his having been beaten mercilessly for misdemeanors even though he was reared in a white neighborhood.

After his high school education, Motley worked as a migratory laborer on such jobs as, ranch hand, cook, shipping clerk, photographer, radio script writer, interviewer for

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<sup>33</sup>New York Times Book Review, July 13, 1947, p. 8.

the Chicago Housing Authority and writer for the Office of Civilian Defense.<sup>34</sup>

This experience has proved an asset to him for he knows the Chicago of which he writes. His work at an extraordinary variety of jobs gave him the opportunity to mix with different groups of people of different races and learn of their experiences which gave him first hand information of those factors out of which often fear producing situations develop.

By the time Mr. Motley was thirty-five years old, he had made three transcontinental trips--by bicycle, by jalopy, by thumb, and by brake-rods. This explains his intimate knowledge of juke joints, Negro sections, hobo-camps and flop-houses of several dozen states, as well as the inside of a jail where he once served thirty days for vagrancy.<sup>35</sup>

Motley learned by his experiences or those of others the meaning of poverty, suppression and fear which came to him only through traveling and working on an extraordinary variety of jobs which gave him the opportunity to mix with different groups of people of different races.

"All the experiences of menial jobs and menial people--the wanderers and the workers, the poor and the

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<sup>34</sup>Who's Who In Colored America, 1950, p. 388.

<sup>35</sup>E. P. Hazard, "The First Novelist," Saturday Review of Literature, February 14, 1948, p. 8.



desperate--he poured into a giant hopper from which he drained off the tale of brutal honesty and profound compassion told in his successful first novel, Knock On Any Door.<sup>36</sup>

On the heels of depression came World War II which gave a relief from poverty but created areas of fear and anger which were universal. Many changes were made in the social, economic and religious world during this period. Men and women were employed with better salaries; new standards of living were advanced, but suppression of minority groups still remained.

Mr. Motley was interested in the minority groups, for it was with these groups that he had talked and worked so as to obtain information about their life. He wanted all America to know what was happening to its youth.

Most Negro authors deal with the uneducated Negro; some deal with the educated Negro, but Willard Motley in his novel, Knock On Any Door, dealt with an Italian boy. When he was asked why he did not write about Negroes his reply was, "I did not write about Negroes because I know Whites as well, and because I feel the Negro writer must not lose sight of other problems, the basic problems that underlie

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

human beings. And the novel Knock On Any Door, was simply an attempt to show how criminals are made.<sup>37</sup>

Out of familiar situations that most of us ignore, Motley fashioned a story that is sometimes tender, sometimes shocking, important in its application and at all times completely compelling.<sup>38</sup>

Research reveals that Richard Wright and Willard Motley were alike in their desire to show how environment make criminals. In Wright's case he had come from a sub-standard American group on the economic scale. He had experienced hardships characteristic of the existence of a Bigger Thomas. His childhood may be described as one of poverty. Hunger and a generous dose of brutality round out the picture of his youthful misery. These actual experiences of Wright were portrayed in the Negro protagonist, Bigger Thomas, which in Wright's writing becomes a race problem. In effect Wright points up the fact that a Negro placed in a hostile, white environment which denies him self-realization, throws the burden of responsibility for the crimes of frustration and fear upon society.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup>New York Times Book Review, July 13, 1947, p. 8.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>39</sup>Hughes, op. cit., pp. 44-47.



Motley drew his protagonist, Nick Romano, from another minority group in America, the Italian race. He digs at the roots of American society and unearths the basic negative forces which pertain to all men. He is concerned with universal man, for fundamentally man in America, as everywhere, has a common origin and will suffer the same common end.<sup>40</sup> Motley's non-Negro protagonist, Nick Romano, though a young Italian, is like Bigger Thomas, a victim of society's pressures.

Ann Petry joins the ranks of Negro writers who discusses aspects of the Negro problem and shows that environment exerts a tremendous influence upon the course of an individual's life. In an unwholesome environment, it is Petry's hypothesis, a Negro is doomed to meet disaster in America. To present her case, Ann Petry creates a world which contains all of the elements of bitterness and eventual destruction on account of race relationship in America. She, like Wright, creates a protagonist portraying a Negro, Mrs. Lutie Johnson, who because of environment was a victim of society.

Wright and Petry advance the thesis that the unwholesome environment provided for the Negro youth corrupts

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 262.

the youth and provokes crime. Motley, however, has a broader vision and advances the thesis that the unwholesome environment provided for youth, in America or elsewhere, corrupts the youth and provokes crime.

In a poor environment there is always a disproportionate amount of fear caused by poverty, undesirable neighbors, social misfits, overcrowded housing conditions, poor health resultant from dilapidated homes, and filth in the home and in the streets.

This is the environment of which Wright, Petry, and Motley wrote either from first hand or vicarious experiences, and showed through their protagonists that the most heinous crimes were committed during frustration and fear.

Indeed, one might assert that acquaintance with the experience of fear is universal; yet exploration of literature, even in psychology, scarcely yields a definition or formulation of the concept of fear any more refined than any to be found in lay literature.

It would seem then, from this concept the best that we can hope is to consider the areas of the various psychological conceptualizations of fear and to see how



## CHAPTER II

### PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF THE FEAR CONCEPT

The fear concepts as portrayed by Wright seem to be personal; the concepts portrayed by Petry and Motley seem as real as those of Wright though they are vicarious.

Investigation in general psychological studies reveal concepts which the writer considers basic to this study. Cannon asserts that fear is a state of excitement having both physiological and psychological concomitants.<sup>1</sup> While any extensive discussion of either of these aspects is more the domain of the specialist of the respective fields, some consideration of these aspects is in order, since "the concept of fear" is central to the writer's thesis. Indeed, one might assert that acquaintance with the experience of fear is universal; yet exploration of literature, even in psychology, scarcely yields a definitive formulation of the concept of fear any more refined than may be found in lay literature.

It would seem then, from this concept the best that we can hope is to consider the areas of the various psychological conceptualizations of fear and to see how

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<sup>1</sup>W. B. Cannon, Bodily Changes in Pain, Hunger, Fear and Rage, Second Edition (New York: Appleton Century Crofts, 1929), pp. 195-228.

the characterizations with respect to fear in Bigger Thomas, Mrs. Lutie Johnson, and Nick Romano are in accord with psychological accounts of the fear emotion.

The researcher has discovered in physiological and psychological literature that discussion of emotions includes coverage of at least, two aspects of emotional reactions: (1) The physiological correlations of emotional responses, and (2) the characteristics of the situations most likely to elicit emotional responses. It was further noted that there is general agreement among physiologists and psychologists in attributing the regulation of emotional reaction to extensive changes of the internal environment of the individual.<sup>2</sup>

Since in her thesis, the writer has used the term "anxiety" in reference to fear, it seems necessary at this time to show the relationship between anxiety and fear as it is used in her thesis.

"Freud made the customary and now accepted distinction between fear and anxiety; that in fear the individual's attention is directed toward some specific object and refers strictly to a condition of the individual."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>S. S. Stevens, "Emotion," Handbook of Experimental Psychology (New York: Wiley, 1951), pp. 473-516.

<sup>3</sup>Sigmund Freud, The Problem of Anxiety (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1945), p. 111.



On the other hand, however, Fenichel states, "All anxiety is fear of experiencing a traumatic state, that is of the possibility that organization of the ego may be overwhelmed by excitation."<sup>4</sup> Fenichel further remarked, "In the case of danger, the affect of anxiety is created by anticipation and is controlled and used as a warning signal."<sup>5</sup>

Hilgard states that the symptoms of emotion, especially of intense emotion, include profound changes through the body. Change regulations in a complex way by the central nervous system, are made by both divisions of the autonomic system, and by endocrine glands.<sup>6</sup>

Since the novelists in portraying their protagonists are not likely to utilize descriptions of physiological changes in order to convey the feeling that they are experiencing in situations of threat or danger, it would seem that one needs a list of indicators of the state of fear as it is reflected in the feelings of people. Such a list may then serve the writer as an index by which to locate in the three novels under study, not only the instances when Bigger Thomas, Lutie Johnson, and Nick Romano experienced fear but also the types of circumstances the novelists choose to use as the provocations

<sup>4</sup>Otto Fenichel, The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1945), p. 16.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>6</sup>Ernest R. Hilgard, Introduction to Psychology, Second Ed. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1940), p. 138.

of fear in characterizing the protagonists. The list of feelings most commonly associated with the experiences is the one that the writer will use as her index by which to analyze the three novels investigated in her thesis, and which constitutes a necessary part of her definition of fear which is taken from a study of fear done by L. F. Shaffer.

During World War II, the problem of the recognition of fear reacting among combat soldiers became crucial to the determining of effective ways of dealing with and minimizing its more dangerous consequences. Laurance F. Shaffer, by interviewing over 4,500 soldiers who were returning from combat, found out how they felt when they were afraid. From their answers, Shaffer was able to compile a list of symptoms most commonly associated with the feeling of fear.<sup>7</sup>

Although many psychologists agree that fear is an emotion that almost prohibits a comprehensive definition, Laurance Shaffer has found that fear is a pure state of non-adjustment, and has no utility that can be discovered. Says he:

Fear is the most extreme and at the same time, the most typical of emotional reactions. It most clearly satisfies the criterion that emotion is a

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<sup>7</sup>Laurance F. Shaffer and Others, "Emotional Behavior," Psychology (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1940), p. 138.



response to situations calling for adjustments that the organism is unprepared to make. Fear is a pure state of non-adjustment, and has no utility that can be discovered.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, it would seem feasible to interpret the behavior of fictional characters in the light of the psychologist's point of view. The list that follows, based on Shaffer's study is the index which the writer will use as her reference to fear as it relates to the protagonists in this thesis.

1. A pounding heart and rapid pulse
2. Extreme muscular tension
3. Easily irritated, angry, sore
4. Dryness of the throat and mouth
5. Nervous perspiration of "cold sweat"
6. Sense of uncertainty that situations could not be happening
7. Trembling
8. Confused
9. Weak and faint
10. Unable to remember what had happened
11. Sick to the stomach
12. Unable to concentrate

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<sup>8</sup>Laurance F. Shaffer and Edward Joseph Shoben, Jr., The Psychology of Adjustment (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1956), p. 101.

13. Sleeplessness

14. Temporary paralysis<sup>9</sup>

The researcher has found passages in each novel, Native Son, The Street, and Knock On Any Door, that show that each protagonist, Bigger Thomas, Lutie Johnson, and Nick Romano, were so completely overcome by fear that each one of them committed a horrible crime--murder.

Further research reveals that of the innate emotions of love, fear, anger, the most seriously disintegrating seems to be fear. The most subtle effect of fear lies in the fact that it often strikes at the very heart of action itself.<sup>10</sup>

Burnham, in his book, The Wholesome Personality, also says, "Of all the factors that tend to disintegrate human personality, none seem to be so bad as fear in its many forms."<sup>11</sup>

In making a comparative analysis of the protagonists, Bigger Thomas, Lutie Johnson, and Nick Romano, the writer intends to show how poverty, anxiety, and hate aroused the emotion of fear so intensely that each of them committed murder.

<sup>9</sup>Shaffer, Psychology, op. cit., p. 138.

<sup>10</sup>William H. Burnham, The Wholesome Personality (New York: D. Appleton Century Company, 1932), p. 109.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 111.



In her thesis, the writer also will show how the protagonists were affected and that the affects of fear both physical and mental were many. The one outstanding condition menacing the mental health of the protagonists is the emotion of fear caused by insecurity.

In the next chapter the writer will attempt to show how the operation of fear on the mind of the characters, Bigger Thomas, Lutie Johnson, and Nick Romano, resulted in the most serious consequences--murder.

The following paragraph will reveal that foremost in the mind of Richard Wright who portrayed Bigger Thomas, was the problem of economic and social freedom which definitely did not exist for Negroes in Wright's native state, Mississippi. This southern state, where the whites firmly believed in, and enforced segregation, gave no outlet for social or economic freedom. Out of this background was developed a condition of fear and hate which gripped the mind of Wright who never became adjusted to the problem of living as it existed between the whites and black races;

therefore, it seems CHAPTER III that this challenging

problem influenced the writing of Wright and accounts for

THE FEAR CONCEPT AS REVEALED IN THE CHARACTERS,  
the kind of fear exhibited in the Bigger Thomas of Native

BIGGER THOMAS, MRS. LUTIE JOHNSON

and Nick Romano

Wright, himself, states that the birth of Bigger Thomas

It now seems logical to show how Bigger Thomas was  
born in fear and was conditioned by his environment. However,  
it would seem germane to the understanding of this study to  
discuss the five Biggers which are only symbols formed by  
the experiences of Wright and are the sum total of the  
Bigger Thomas in Native Son. These five Biggers are only  
facets of Negro characters found in Wright's state, Missis-  
sippi.

The following examples will reveal that foremost  
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of living as it existed between the white and black races;

Wright, D. 3.



therefore, it seems feasible to say that this challenging problem influenced the writing of Wright and accounts for the kind of fear exhibited in the Bigger Thomas of Native Son.

Wright, himself, states "the birth of Bigger Thomas goes back to my childhood, and there was not just one Bigger, but there were many of them."<sup>1</sup> He gives an account only of five of the Biggers with whom he came in contact during his youth. Bigger number one was a boy whom Wright knew and feared in his childhood.

The birth of Bigger Thomas goes back to my childhood. When I was a barefoot kid in Jackson, Mississippi, there was a boy who terrorized me and all of the boys I played with. If we were playing games, he would sauter up and snatch our toys from us. We would stand around pouting, sniffing, trying to keep back our tears, begging for our playthings. But Bigger would refuse. We never demanded that he give them back; we were afraid and Bigger was bad.<sup>2</sup>

Even during the childhood of Wright, Bigger number one was taking shape and was being conceived in fear.

Norman Vincent Peale, quoting a well-known psychologist, declares, "fear is the most disintegrating enemy of human

<sup>1</sup>Richard Wright, "How Bigger Was Born," Saturday Review of Literature. June, 1940, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

personality."<sup>3</sup> He divides fear into two categories, normal and abnormal. Normal fear prevents one from taking chances which are hazardous and foolish. Without normal fear a person cannot be a well organized personality because he is lacking in ordinary and sensible caution. Abnormal fear causes one to live in terror. It is a center and source of complexes. It tangles the mind with obsessions and it draws off energies, destroys inner peace and blocks power.<sup>4</sup>

In this study the writer has found Bigger Thomas to be just such character whose mind is so tangled with obsessions caused by fear that he became a cruel bully and a criminal.

Another experience of Wright is revealed in Bigger number two.

Let me call the next one Bigger number two. He was seventeen and tougher than the first Bigger. The hardness of this Bigger was not directed toward me or the other Negroes, but the whites who ruled the South. He bought clothes and food on credit and would not pay for them. He lived in the dingy shacks of the white landlords and refused to pay rent. Of course, he had no money, but neither did we. We did without he never would. When we would ask him why he did such things,

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<sup>3</sup>Norman Vincent Peale, A Guide to Confident Living (New York: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1948), p. 130.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 130.



he would tell us that the white folk had everything and he had nothing.<sup>5</sup>

Thus Bigger number two was frustrated and aggressive as a result of a feeling that the white folk had everything but offered no opportunity to him or his race to possess the necessities of life.

The psychologists, Shaffer and Shoben, after making many observations of frustration and aggression stated, "from the observation that frustration may increase the strength of drives, is only one step to the next principle, that frustration often results in aggression."<sup>6</sup> These same psychologists say that "a drive is a pattern of persistent stimulation that evokes sustained activity."<sup>7</sup>

This was the condition of Bigger Thomas who, because of his aggressiveness, developed a behavior pattern so negative that he was known as a tough guy. Wright's actual experiences are so exemplified in the life of Bigger number one whose emotional behavior characterized by a feeling tone of unpleasantness took the role of a bully. There,

<sup>5</sup>Wright, op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>6</sup>Laurance F. Shaffer and Edward Joseph Shoben, Jr. The Psychology of Adjustment (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company), p. 12.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 101.

however, was the third Bigger who was what the white folk called a bad nigger.

I once worked as a ticket-taker in a Negro movie house. Bigger number three came to the door and gave my arm a hard pinch and walked into the theater. Resentfully and silently, I nursed my bruised arm. Presently the proprietor would come over and ask how things were going. I'd point into the darkened theater and say, "Bigger's in there." "Did he pay?" the proprietor would ask. "No, Sir," I'd answer.<sup>8</sup>

Thus Bigger number three was a frustrated, unhappy character. There was Bigger number one, the "Bully," Bigger number two, the "Tough Guy," and Bigger number three, the "Bad Nigger." Still there was a Bigger number four whose only law was death.

Bigger number four would not work for he regarded ditch digging for fifty cents a day as slavery. He hated the Jim Crow laws and frequently broke them.

And then there was Bigger number four whose only law was death. The Jim Crow laws were not for him. But as he laughed and cursed and broke them, he knew that some day he would have to pay for his freedom. He had no job, for he regarded digging ditches for fifty cents a day as slavery. "I can't live on that," he would say. Often I would find him reading a book; he would stop and in a joking, wistful, and cynical way mimic the

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<sup>8</sup>Wright, op. cit., p. 3.



the white folk. Bigger was sent to the asylum for the insane.<sup>9</sup>

The problem of living was a mental strain on Bigger number four as he could never become adjusted to the Jim Crow laws, and the problem of an existence was impossible at a wage of fifty cents a day. To break the Jim Crow laws caused a traumatic fear, that is, fear of physical or bodily harm which may cause death. Not to be able to obtain adequate financial support which will keep poverty from the door of an individual will cause mental strain. Should the individual have a mental weakness, the strain could cause him to become mentally unbalanced and he would have to be sent to the asylum. This seems to have been the condition of Bigger number four.

Still another Bigger is Bigger number five, a young illiterate with bravado.

Then there was Bigger number five who rode the Jim Crow street cars without paying and sat wherever he pleased. He sat in the white section. The conductor came over to him and said, "Move over where you belong. Can't you read?" "Naw, I can't read," Bigger answered. The conductor flared up. "Get out of that seat." Bigger took out his knife, opened it, held it nonchalantly in his hand, and replied: "Make me." I don't know what happened to Bigger number five but I can guess.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

These were the many-sided natures of the Bigger Thomases as they were developed in the mind of Richard Wright. In effect he points out the fact that an individual placed in a hostile environment which denies him self-realization, throws the burden of responsibility for his crimes of frustration and fear upon society. Bigger's terrifying behavior pattern results from a special attitude produced by environment. The role was not played in Wright's state, Mississippi but the setting was made in Chicago's Black Belt where more than one thousand Negroes lived in old apartment buildings. Even the Thomases, Bigger's family, lived in an old two room apartment owned by the Dalton Real Estate Company.<sup>11</sup>

Overcrowded conditions, narrow, dirty, crowded streets, illiteracy, poverty and crime, in Chicago, New York or any other city, produces an environment in which criminals are made; it was in this environment that Bigger lived. In reality, Bigger is a victim of society.<sup>12</sup>

Wright further stated that as he grew older, he became familiar with the Bigger Thomas conditioning and its

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<sup>11</sup>Richard Wright, Native Son (New York: The Modern Library, Harper and Brothers, 1940), p. 238.

<sup>12</sup>Carl Milton Hughes, The Negro Novelist (New York: The Citadel Press, 1940-1950), p. 44.



numerous shadings no matter where he saw it in Negro life. It was not as blatant or extreme as in the originals, but it was there, nevertheless, like an undeveloped negative.<sup>13</sup>

The final character, Bigger Thomas, took shape in Chicago rather than in the South because Bigger Thomas as a character could not have come to full development in Wright's native state, Mississippi. Wright states:

As my mind extended in this general and abstract manner it was fed with even more vivid and concrete examples of the lives of Bigger Thomas. The urban environment of Chicago affording a more stimulating life, made the Negro Bigger Thomases react more violently than even in the South. More than ever I began to see and understand the environmental factors which made for this extreme conduct. It was not that Chicago had segregated Negroes more than the South, but that Chicago had more to offer, that Chicago's physical aspects--noisy, crowded, filled with the sense of power and fulfillment--did so much more to dazzle the mind with a taunting sense of possible achievement that the segregation it did impose brought forth from Bigger a reaction more obstreperous than in the South.<sup>14</sup>

The writer has shown that all of Wright's young life has been one of stress, of emotion, of fear, of situations that came surging up, tangled, fused and knotted. Wright

<sup>13</sup>Wright, Saturday Review of Literature, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

acknowledges that during the years in which he had met the five Bigger Thomases that he had not consciously gathered material to write about them.

I had not kept a notebook record of their sayings and doings. Their reactions had simply made impressions upon my sensibilities as I lived from day to day, impressions which crystallized and coagulated into clusters and configurations of memory, attitudes, moods, ideas. And these subjective states, in turn, were automatically stored away somewhere in me. I was not even aware of the process, but excited over the book which I had set for myself to do, under the stress of emotion, these things came entertaining me by the sheer variety and potency of their meaning and suggestiveness.<sup>15</sup>

Thus stored in the mind of Richard Wright were the memories of his childhood experiences which he had with these five Bigger Thomases. These experiences he melted into one big form out of which was created the Bigger Thomas in Native Son. With an earnest desire to write a truthful, interesting story, he states:

With the whole theme in mind, in an attitude akin to prayer, I gave myself up to the story. I was guided by but one criterion: to tell the truth as I saw it and felt it. That is, to objectify in words some insight derived from my living in the form of action, scene, and dialogue.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 4.



It seems to the writer that Richard Wright wrote not honestly of his experiences and objectified in words some of his feeling caused by neglect, suppression, segregation and insecurity, and injected this feeling of the five Bigger Thomases into one character, Bigger Thomas of Native Son.

The manner in which he describes "How Bigger Was Born," gives vivid and concrete examples of the lives of Bigger Thomas. The urban environment of Chicago which afforded a more stimulating life caused Bigger to react more violently than he could have acted in the South. Wright stated, "It was not that Chicago had segregated Negroes more than the South, but that Chicago had more to offer. Its physical aspects, noisy, crowded--filled with the sense of power and fulfillment, did so much more to dazzle the mind with a taunting sense of possible achievement that the segregation it did impose brought forth from Bigger a reaction more turbulent than in the South."<sup>17</sup>

The environmental factors in the Black Belt of Chicago contributed to the extreme negative conduct of Bigger and gave reason for anxiety, hate and fear.

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

Fear is a great mental disorder which may emerge not only as a destroyer of personality but as a destroyer of one's freedom. Both personality and freedom influenced by the emotion and fear were destroyed in Bigger Thomas.

Insecurity causes fear and is a source which has caused destruction in each of the protagonists under discussion in this thesis.

In her research, the writer has found that there were times during the study of these protagonists, Bigger Thomas, Lutie Johnson, and Nick Romano, when one or the other of the neurotic symptoms of fear, given in Shaffer's list stated in a previous chapter, was found in them. The psychological concepts of fear which the writer feels are most applicable to the reactions of the protagonists as seen by the symptoms of fear given in Shaffer's list are anxiety, hate and fear.

According to Shaffer's list mentioned in a previous chapter, definite symptoms of fear were given as compared with the statement of the soldiers whom he interviewed. Such symptoms as extreme muscular tension, easily irritated, angry and sore, and confused or rattled were portrayed in Bigger Thomas when he became the leader of a gang who planned jobs of petty robbery. His gang planned to rob Blum's store. Bigger was afraid to go through with the robbery, so was his



friend, Gus. He urged Gus to be with him, but he did not want Gus to know that he was afraid. "Even though Gus objected to the plan, the fear that Gus would really go caused Bigger's stomach to tighten; he was hot all over and felt that he wanted to sneeze but could not." To hide his fear, Bigger took the role of a bully, for fear had such a hold on him that he approached his best friend, Gus, "with eyes red with anger, with fists clenched so stiffly to his sides that he showed more than ever before his neurotic condition of frustration and fear."<sup>18</sup> It seemed that at this time Bigger became so emotionally frustrated and fear became so paramount that he could no longer hide his mental weakness.

Again Bigger was seized with a panic of fear resulting in such symptoms as sleeplessness, trembling and pounding of the heart as the following paragraph will show.

After Bigger had murdered Mary Dalton, he fled to his mother's home and slipped to bed but he was unable to sleep. He lay in bed, only a few seconds from deep sleep unable to rise to the land of the living. "Then in answer to a foreboding call from the dark part of his mind, he

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<sup>18</sup>Richard Wright, Native Son (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1940), p. 23.

leaped from bed. His heart raced; his lips parted; his legs trembled."<sup>19</sup> Symptom number eleven in Shaffer's list indicates fear in Bigger when "for some time he was unable to remember what had happened, but it was all clear to him now."<sup>20</sup> It was Sunday morning and he remembered that he had killed and burned Mary Dalton on Saturday night, just a few hours ago. Fear seized him again as symptom number five indicates. "Though the air of the room was cold, beads of sweat broke onto his forehead and his nerves urged him to flee from his mother's home; to display false pretense in the Dalton home, and to flee to his mistress, Bessie Mears, for consolation and help. He related the story of the murder to Bessie but later, he became fearful that under pressure, should she be picked up for questioning by the police, she might tell them the whole story; therefore, he murdered her."<sup>21</sup>

There seemed in each passing moment an incident which caused fear to mount in Bigger Thomas. Dr. Sidis, the great psychologist, says, "Here is a thing that everyone should bear in mind: one kind of fear tends to generate another."

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<sup>19</sup>Wright, Native Son, op. cit., p. 91.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 221.



That is, the instinct of fear has a tendency of diffusion."<sup>22</sup>

The writer has shown that Bigger feared and distrusted Gus, his friend. Fear caused him to murder Mary Dalton. He then feared for his life after the murder of Mary Dalton. He fled to Bessie for consolation and told her the story of the murder and later murdered her for fear that she might tell his secret. These crimes were committed as a safeguard from bodily harm that might come to him.

The writer has attempted to establish the fact that the protagonist, Bigger Thomas, was born out of a situation of frustration and fear; therefore, it seems feasible to say that in everything he did there was a signal which set off a chain reaction of fear emotions which in the final analysis caused him to commit murder twice.

During Bigger's flight, he realized that he would soon be apprehended and that he would not be able to cope with the danger that might arise; therefore, he would be thrown into a catastrophic situation.

It seems to the writer that the hate and fear that was inspired in him; that were woven into the very structure of his consciousness, caused both physiological

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<sup>22</sup>Edward Huntington Williams and Others, Our Fear Complexes (Indianapolis: The Bobbs, Merrill Co., 1923), p. 81.

and psychological reactions as these passages will show.

"The fear of capture caused Bigger to forget even the cold."<sup>23</sup> "The sound of the siren in the street as the mob approached the building caused Bigger to want to clutch at his throat for as long as the siren sounded; it seemed that he could not breathe."<sup>24</sup>

The second novelist is Mrs. Ann Petry, who out of her experience as a newspaper reporter and a writer of articles for magazines, created a character, Mrs. Lutie Johnson. This character was a realistic presentation of a character who struggles against every disadvantage to obtain economic security. The lack of economic security caused undesirable situations which created fear in Lutie: a fear of poverty, a fear of the influence which the environment would have on a young child, a traumatic fear for herself and the child in the dilapidated apartment or on the street, all of which grew out of the scenes that Ann Petry had investigated as a newspaper reporter.

The symbol, Mrs. Lutie Johnson, was defeated in creation; first because she was both beautiful and intelligent;

<sup>23</sup>Wright, Native Son, op. cit., p. 246.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 239.



and secondly, because she had no job; she had no home of her own; she was a Negro woman placed on the street in search for a job and an apartment in which she and her son could live decently. This predicament seems automatically to place a character in a position to be subjected to any environmental force surrounding it. Lutie Johnson, in Petry's The Street, is the character subjected to such an environment.<sup>25</sup>

She is maneuvered on every turn by environment. The fact that she is bound by her decision to be a morally pure woman in accordance with her standards shows how ineffectual such a position is against relentless forces of environment. These forces disintegrate human personality. In the first place the street itself has a negative influence when it is in a dilapidated neighborhood. Her economic background will not permit her to take an apartment in a better one. The apartments in the building are unsuitable for homes.<sup>26</sup>

The street, a narrow, dirty, fearfully busy street where murder and crime were common scenes as was 116th Street in Harlem. In this same street where Ann Petry, the author, had seen poverty magnified, men murdered and

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<sup>25</sup>Ann Petry, The Street (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Riverside Press, 1946), p. 94.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

women in a despondent condition; children were found wearing ragged clothing, hungry and cold, out playing in the street as there was no other place for recreation provided for them. Fear, hate, despondency, frustration and anxiety were common virtues of any character who lived on 116th Street; not only this street but any street where people were packed like sardines in a can and had to exist in certain areas with little or no consideration for such existence.

It was a bad street. It was not just this street she was afraid of or that was bad; it was any street where people were packed together like sardines in a can.<sup>27</sup>

This street gives a very graphic picture of what this type of environment means with its criminal effects on character; this street on which Lutie Johnson had to live.

The writer assumes that the idea of a morally pure character on this type of street in this sort of environment had cause for fear. "Lutie feared that the strangle hold of the environment would eventually ensnare her."<sup>28</sup> Thus Ann Petry placed the fear that she experienced for

<sup>27</sup>Hughes, op. cit., p. 95.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 90. *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis*

(New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1945), p. 88.

<sup>30</sup>Petry, op. cit., p. 388.



many women whom she had met in Harlem, in this character, Lutie Johnson. Lutie was filled with anxiety from the time she began her adventure "job hunting" until the "end." According to Otto Fenichel, "All anxiety is fear of experiencing a traumatic state, that is of the possibility that the organization of the ego may be overwhelmed by excitation."<sup>29</sup> In other words, a fear of experiencing any injury that would cause bodily harm or destruction.

This was the state of mind with which Lutie Johnson existed. Fear became such a monster in the life of this protagonist, Lutie Johnson, that it destroyed her personality and the freedom of Bub, the son whom she was working so hard to save from the snares and pitfalls of the street.

To verify this statement, Ann Petry, in her novel, The Street, in speaking of the protagonists, Lutie Johnson, states:

Nothing mattered now. She had worked night and day hoping to move out of this gloomy, dismal environment which she had feared would lead her boy into crime. Bub would go to the reform school. She reached out and touched the wall with her hand, then leaned the weight of her body against it because her legs were trembling, the muscles quivering, and knees buckling.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Otto Fenichel, The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1945), p. 88.

<sup>30</sup>Petry, op. cit., p. 388.

Thus weakened by fear, Lutie is left despondent and afraid. One fear after the other seemed to develop in her mind. Distrust of the people who lived in the old dilapidated building gave cause for fear. She did not like the evil eyes of the landlady, Mrs. Hedges, who continually watched her as she came in or went out of the building. Her fear mounted when she came into the presence of Jones, the caretaker. One day as she entered the building to go up to her apartment, she was immediately aware of a figure whom she knew was Jones, the caretaker, between her and her apartment door as she mounted the stairs. This caused reactions which according to Shaffer's list of indicators, are symptoms of fear. These symptoms as the following statements will show are dryness of throat, extreme muscular tension and temporary paralysis.

For a moment she was unable to move. Her throat went dry and tight with fear. She forced herself to walk toward the stairs, aware as she moved that her gait was stiff and unnatural almost as though her muscles were rebelling against any motion.<sup>31</sup>

As she approached Jones he grabbed her. Mrs. Hedges, the housekeeper, heard her screams and ran to rescue her. She was released from the hands of this monster, Jones, who

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 235.



was half dragging and half carrying her down the stairway. While the irate landlady emphatically reminded Jones to keep his hands off of Lutie, "Lutie walked away from them, intent on getting up the stairs as quickly as possible but another physiological reaction over which she had no control caused her to sit down. Her legs refused to carry her and she sat down suddenly on the bottom step."<sup>32</sup>

Still another symptom which is given in Shaffer's list of indicators which appears in the above passage is "weak and faint." After this encounter with Jones, Mrs. Hedges took Lutie to her apartment and gave her some hot tea which revived her. The tea was scalding hot and fragrant. As Lutie sipped it, she could feel some of the shuddering go out of her. She did not want Bub, her little nine year old son, to know of her fear; hence, she would avoid being in his presence when she felt sickened from fright. She turned away and went into the kitchen so that Bub would not see the expression of her face, because she was afraid and angry and at the same time sickened.<sup>33</sup>

She did not wish to frighten Bub nor did she wish to give him cause to know that she was afraid. "This

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 239.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 109.

sickening condition," according to the psychologist, John Dashiell, "is a fear type of visceral excitement, which includes worry and anxiety and is one of the most disrupting. In the case of danger, the affect of anxiety is created by anticipation and is controlled and used as a warning signal."<sup>34</sup>

It seems the novelist, through this character, Lutie Johnson, is attempting to show that this warning signal may come to any individual who is in danger and that the inevitable power, "fear," will soon cause destruction in any character. Shaffer's list of fear symptoms includes one labeled a sickening condition; however, he states the symptom as, "sick to the stomach."<sup>35</sup>

The fear symptoms which reappear when Lutie received the message of Bub's arrest are pounding of the heart, trembling, and weak and faint. The one thing that she hoped would never happen was Bub's being influenced to commit a crime. So suddenly surprised was she when she learned that her son had been taken into custody that this shock caused a continuation of the physiological reaction joined by psychological concomitance which left her weak,

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<sup>34</sup>J. F. Dashiell, Fundamentals of General Psychology (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1937), p. 91.

<sup>35</sup>Laurance F. Shaffer, "Fear and Courage in Aerial Combat," Journal of Consultant Psychology, 1947, pp. 137-143.



faint and despondent. "Her heart pounded heavily; she was trembling with fear."<sup>36</sup> What would happen to him now? Again she was overcome with fear. "Bub would go to the reform school. She reached out and touched the wall with her hand, then leaned the weight of her body against it because her legs were trembling, her muscles quivering and knees buckling."<sup>37</sup>

According to Shaffer's list of symptoms, Lutie was completely overcome with fear and all of these physiological changes indicate a disturbance of bodily or organic processes. Since she could not overcome the emotion of fear, there was a disturbance in her body which caused the reactions mentioned in the preceding paragraph.

These tremors, muscular twitchings, the assumption of characteristic attitudes, all indicate that there is an immensely augmented activity of the nervous system in Lutie Johnson.

Like Bigger Thomas, Lutie Johnson seemed despondent because of poverty, suppression and segregation and was driven to murder as a result of such arousal aspects as anxiety, hate and fear, though she never committed the same crime twice.

<sup>36</sup>Petry, op. cit., p. 433.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 388.

There are similar fear symptoms, which the writer will discuss, found in the life of the third and last protagonist, Nick Romano; therefore, it seems expedient that the writer should discuss some of the background in the life of this protagonist which produced the fear producing situations.

Nick Romano, the protagonist of Motley in Knock On Any Door, was in his childhood an altar boy. "Nick lit the tall candles on the altar, touching them with long taper and seeing them come alive; he genuflected before the tabernacle where Christ was, and then returned to the sacristy."<sup>38</sup>

In his early childhood, Romano had a good social background with Christian parents whose ambition it was to see their Nick become a priest. In his formative years before he had reached the age of fourteen, a sudden change from a life of economic, social and religious decency to a life of poverty, caused young Nick Romano who was an altar boy and destined to become a priest at the age of twelve, to become a criminal and die in the electric chair at the age of twenty-one.

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<sup>38</sup>Hughes, op. cit., p. 97.



Pa Romano came home with a drawn-up, stern looking face like Nick had never seen before; the sight of which caused such a psychological reaction that Nick, Julian and Aug waited quietly and fearfully downstairs while their mother gently, but nervously assisted their father to an upstairs bedroom. Pa had lost the grocery store and all of its contents! The sudden falling from security to the state of insecurity shook the foundation of Romano's household thus causing anxiety and fear. They were poor! Within two or three days they were left homeless with no food, no job, no money and the new car that was half paid for was reclaimed by the dealer. Their only household possessions left were the table and chairs from the kitchen, a bed, couch and a gilded frame containing the picture of the Virgin Mary. Their only alternative then, was to seek shelter in an old dingy house across the railroad tracks in an area where there were gangsters, hold-ups, and killings.

At the period of young Nick's life when care, guidance, and sympathetic understanding of parents and friends, and the comfort of a home were needed most, Nick with his parents moved into the slum district away from his friends, his school and his church. Thus he enters a

fear producing situation. Young Nick could not attend school at St. Augustine's any more. "It was on the good side of town and now he would have to enter school with the tough, ill-mannered, retarded boys who needed haircuts and wore dirty clothes."<sup>39</sup> Nick soon learned that these youngsters, in attitude and disposition, were very much like their appearances, for it was in this school that Nick with his idea of "trying to help others" got into trouble with his reactionary school teachers.

Nick became friendly with Tony and Manuel, his classmates, and before he realized it he had learned the tactics of the gang. Half hungry most of the time, Nick found himself involved in situations which caused such psychological and physiological reactions that the writer identifies them as symptoms of fear. When Nick became the lookout man for Tony and Manuel while they were out stealing pies from the bakery, there were symptoms of fear demonstrated such as "trembling." "His eyes went up and down the alley where they saw shadows moving toward them; Nick held his breath."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Willard Motley, Knock On Any Door (New York: Appleton Century Company, 1946), pp. 17-19.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 27.



These are some of the fear producing situations which first brought fear into the life of the young Italian protagonist, Nick Romano.

The knowledge of his gangland tactics increased so rapidly that by the time that he was fifteen years of age he had spent some time in the reformatory. There were found in his experiences, arousal aspects which triggered off fear during his stay in the reformatory. An encounter with the housefather which resulted in Nick's first whipping caused him to become so possessed with fear that he was unable to concentrate. "The housefather whipped Nick with a strap and told him to get in line.....Nick fell in line. He did not know anything. He was scared."<sup>41</sup> The writer interprets the statement, "He did not know anything," to mean that he not only was unable to concentrate but that there was a sense of uncertainty that situations could not be happening, especially to him.

A further discussion of the experiences of Nick Romano will show possibly all the symptoms of fear which are in accord with the foregoing list in the writer's thesis.

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

Nick talked himself into a fight with Bricktop, the Bully. He turned inward to all his fear and panic, sat down heavily on the bench. He did not want to fight, but he had to go on with it now. All of his strength, even his words, drained out of him. He swallowed dryly to get his heart back in place and to keep his fear inside of him for he did not want to be a coward.<sup>42</sup> The symptoms most commonly associated with fear as stated above are "weak and faint," "dryness of throat and mouth," and a "pounding heart." All of these symptoms which according to the psychological analysis made by Shaffer are symptoms of fear. Nick became tense with fear as this passage will show. "Nick sat, leaned forward a little with his shoulders slumped and his palms clenched tightly over the splintery edge of the bench."<sup>43</sup> So strong was his emotion which tended to impel some sort of action that he wanted to escape from the threatening situation, but it was too late now. He had to fight.

Willard Motley, the creator of the protagonist, Nick Romano, states, "Fear was in his heart spelled with capital letters."<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 69.



Nick was aware of an immediate and present situation which he knew was dangerous and immediately after he became aware of this feeling of weakness, there was involved a tension of his muscles and a pounding of his heart which are symptoms of fear. Other symptoms of fear revealed in Nick Romano during his encounter with the policeman, Riley, was trembling, easily irritated, angry and sore, confused or rattled and tension of the muscles. Nick had killed the one man he hated. Immediately he ran into the alley. He staggered into it on weak and shaking legs and leaned weakly against the wall of a building. He put his forehead against it and gasped for breath, strangling and sobbing. He knotted his fists and held them stiffly to his sides.<sup>45</sup> Fear got such a hold on him that he shook all over. Many symptoms of fear are revealed in the life of Nick and are shown at this time, for he had no control of his emotions. He pulled his shoulders, his arms, and his legs in stiffly, trying to stop their shaking. Nick was in a terribly nervous condition, as one can see, for fear caused him to tremble convulsively, to become weak and faint and to become so confused that his mouth sagged open. For the lack of moral strength, Nick could go no farther. He felt weak and

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., pp. 335-336.

helpless and in this neurotic state, he could not restrain himself; therefore, he sobbed for air. He sobbed in fear, anger and impotence.<sup>46</sup> Thus, the many bodily changes which took place in Nick during his experiences of unpleasant emotions are, according to Shaffer's list as is given in the writer's thesis, symptoms of fear.

Out of the mass of changes going on in intense emotion, psychologists have studied a number of indicators of fear. Many of these changes were experiences of Nick Romano. After a dragnet was thrown around the city and Nick was apprehended, such indicators as were selected from the experiences of World War II soldiers could have been selected easily from like experiences of Nick Romano as the following passages indicate.

Every strange noise caused him to shake with fear. He knotted himself into a tighter ball. He stood staring into its whiteness with his teeth clenched and his hands in fists at his sides.<sup>47</sup>

These bodily changes experienced by the protagonist, Nick Romano, correspond with the experiences of the soldiers and compare with the indicator, muscle tension and tremor,

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 336.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 348.



which are in accord with the experiment made by the psychologist, Laurance F. Shaffer.<sup>48</sup>

The writer has attempted to show symptoms of fear in Nick Romano similar to those of Bigger Thomas; to prove that Bigger, for a short time, was unable to concentrate and unable to remember what had happened after he had murdered Mary Dalton. Likewise, Nick also, was unable to remember what had happened when he had murdered the policeman, Riley. The following statement will show that he lay still, shivering with fear and trying to remember where he was.

Nick came awake. He lay with his eyes closed, shivering with fear. He lay perfectly still trying to remember where he was. He opened his eyes slowly...  
....Riley!<sup>49</sup>

Nick remembered that he had murdered Riley, the policeman; thus, "fear welled up into his eyes."<sup>50</sup>

Tremors, muscular twitchings, the assumption of characteristic attitudes, all indicate that there is an augmented activity of the nervous system which is portrayed

<sup>48</sup>Shaffer, Journal of Consultant Psychology, pp. 137-143.

<sup>49</sup>Motley, op. cit., p. 348.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 348.

in the life of Nick Romano. According to the definition of fear given, the indicators which have been pointed out show, not only the feeling side of fear but, also, appear in the character of the young protagonist after each situation which provoked the feeling.

The short life of Nick and the way it was lived definitely is in accord with his motto, "Live fast, die young, and have a good looking corpse."<sup>51</sup>

Other indicators that fear in this protagonist had mounted superbly are shown in his last struggle for life when he lay with every nerve screaming, every emotion tearing and every blood vessel pounding. Again he was so possessed with fear that he drifted off into unconsciousness, but as he lay drifting, he thought, "Live fast, die young, and have a good looking corpse."<sup>52</sup>

Thus, the protagonist, young twenty-one year old Nick Romano lived according to his motto and died in fear and frustration.

The writer has attempted to show that the dominating emotion in each of the protagonists, Bigger Thomas, Lutie

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 477.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 483.



Johnson, and Nick Romano, is fear. Also, she has attempted to show how fear affected and influenced each of these protagonists.

The material presented in the preceding chapters gives some definite idea about fear and how it is portrayed in the lives of the protagonists by their authors, Richard Wright, Ann Petry, and Willard Motley, respectively.

The period, during the 1930's and early 1940's, in which each of these authors wrote, probably had a great influence on their writing. This was the period of the big depression. Many people were unemployed and jobs were hard to obtain. Many idle hours were spent by the youngsters and adults as well, in day-dreaming, planning robberies, and in committing crimes. This type of living and of thinking, as one can see, brings about a big social and economic problem which involves one special and important unit in society, the family.

The researcher has found that in each novel studied, Native Son, The Street, and Knock On Any Door, and in the case of each protagonist, Bigger Thomas, Lutie Johnson, and Nick Romano, that the problem of depression caused a disunion in the family. In each family there had been misunderstandings,

poverty, anxiety, neglect, anger, hate and fear. In the experiences of each of the authors, directly or indirectly, were the same creative forces which influenced the protagonists under discussion. In this thesis, however, the writer has attempted to show that the specific creative forces out of which Bigger Thomas, Lutie Johnson, and Nick Romano were produced are anxiety, hate and fear.

Research reveals that a trauma caused Bigger Thomas to accidentally murder the first victim, but he was so overcome with fear that he purposely murdered the second victim and fled. Poverty caused the second protagonist, Lutie Johnson, to get into a situation which caused fear resulting in murder and she fled. Like Thomas and Johnson, Romano was aroused with hate and anger to such an extent that the result was murder and he fled.

To obtain raw material for his novel, Richard Wright confessedly dug into his experiences and compounded a symptomatic hero, Bigger Thomas, out of five social misfits that he had earlier known. These disjointed and maladjusted personalities were worked over by his creative imagination until a synthetic character, Bigger Thomas of Native Son emerged.



Through Bigger Thomas, one finds an exciting and disturbing case study of a young twenty-one year old Negro murderer who is caught up in the Ghetto of Chicago and is driven through fear to commit three serious crimes, one after the other. This action of Bigger's agrees with the statement made by Dr. Sidis, a well known psychologist, who is quoted by Williams, Hoag, and Bryant in their book, Our Fear Complexes, who said, "Bear in mind one kind of fear tends to generate another." The following crimes give some proof of the generating fear in the life of Bigger Thomas.

In crime number one, for fear of being accused of rape if he were caught in the bedroom of Mary Dalton who in a drunken condition had to be assisted upstairs, Bigger Thomas smothered her by throwing a pillow over her head to keep her from making any noise while her mother was present in the room. In crime number two, for fear of his life, should it be found out that he had killed this white girl, he dissevered her body and burned it in the furnace of her home. Crime number three points out for fear that his girl friend, Bessie Mears, to whom he had confessed his crime, would tell the police of his crime, he raped her, murdered her, and threw her body down an old air shaft in an old deserted house.

It is highly significant, as one can see, that the full psychological exposition of the plight of Bigger Thomas portrays fear which was so mounted in him at this time that it seems feasible to say that Bigger Thomas became so hopelessly despairing of making a good life for himself that he was driven to crime and execution before his adult life hardly had begun.

The writer suggests that there were three influences which might have aroused such emotions that caused the protagonists to act as they did. These influences were (1) the time and environment in which the authors lived and wrote; (2) the environment out of which the protagonists were created; and (3) the environment and situations in which the protagonists were involved.

Noteworthy among these were the depression days and insecurity which caused fear; the broken homes and poverty; the creative forces that produced the protagonists, and the exciting conditions that placed the protagonists in such positions that they became obsessed by fear and exhibited symptoms of fear which are substantiated by the psychological investigation made by the psychologist, Laurance F. Shaffer.

In her research, the writer found that Ann Petry made her debut as an author during the depression years



when economic and social lives were threatened by poverty and distress. Many families were insecure and evils which caused fear existed among them. It was during this period that a newspaper reporter made an intensified survey of 116th Street and Seventh Avenue in New York City where she secured news for her newspaper and magazine articles. Ann Petry, the reporter, joined the ranks of American writers and depicts life in an unwholesome environment which destroys character, creates fear, and causes a multiplicity of crimes. It was out of her experiences of six years in New York's Harlem that her masterpiece, The Street, was produced and the protagonist, Lutie Johnson, appeared.

Also in this thesis, the writer has attempted to show that the motivating influence in the life of Lutie Johnson is the desire for financial security which she needs in order to give her nine year old son, Bub, a healthy, normal life. This was her greatest ambition. But, the ambition was not realized soon enough, for Bub was caught in the threshold of evil and sent to a juvenile home before she could get the finance she needed to secure for him a better home. In frustration, fear and panic, Lutie stepped out into a world which seemed cold, dark and

dreary to obtain the money that she needed to give to her one and only child, Bub, the freedom that she knew he so justly deserved. This protagonist, portrays a tragic figure in an ineffectual battle in trembling and in fear, she was driven to commit murder and thus ran away from the one thing for which she had fought.

It was fear that caused Bigger Thomas to commit murder and flee, and fear also caused Lutie Johnson to commit murder and flee. Much like these two protagonists was another protagonist, Nick Romano, whose attitude and conduct; economic and social environment caused him to become so aroused with a fear and hate emotion that the result was murder. Then he fled.

Out of all the experiences of menial jobs and menial people, the wanderers and the workers, the poor and the desperate, Willard Motley, who sought first hand information by traveling, by working and conversing with different groups of people and by placing himself in the position of the wanderer, produced the novel, Knock On Any Door. It was in this novel that Motley created the protagonist, an Italian youth, Nick Romano, in whom trials of human personality were portrayed.



The sudden change from security to poverty was too much for the young Italian, Nick Romano, whose early tendencies towards decency were slowly beaten down by his contacts with life along the Chicago streets, in the pool rooms and in the honky-tonks. The transformation of Nick's character was very great and at every turn for the worse the forces of evil were so overwhelming that he was influenced by his motto—"Live fast, die young and have a good looking corpse."

The operation of fear on the mind is often, if uncorrected, attended with the most serious consequences. In each case study in this thesis, the researcher has shown that the most serious consequences were caused by fear which ended in murder. The inherent elements, slums, poverty, and ignorance, produced an environment that changed a very sensitive boy whose ambition was to become a priest into a hardened criminal. The writer maintains that the specific creative forces out of which these criminals were produced are anxiety, hate and fear.

characters, Sigger Thomas, Little Johnnie, and Nick Romano, also, what physiological and psychological reactions were made that portrayed fear in the protagonists. To know this

## CHAPTER IV

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this study, the writer has shown by comparative analysis, similarities and examples of how fear affected and influenced the protagonists, Bigger Thomas, Lutie Johnson and Nick Romano, and to what extent fear influenced the social, economic and religious lives of the characters.

For the purpose of this study the concept of fear was limited to fear caused by anxiety, anger, hate, poverty and suppression as portrayed in the life of Bigger Thomas, Lutie Johnson, and Nick Romano, as found in Richard Wright's Native Son, Ann Petry's The Street, and Willard Motley's Knock On Any Door.

The researcher has attempted to prove by her study of the three novels listed in the preceding paragraph, biographies of the authors, magazine and newspaper articles, reference books and the work of a few nationally known psychologists, how fear influenced the lives of these characters, Bigger Thomas, Lutie Johnson, and Nick Romano, also, what physiological and psychological reactions were made that portrayed fear in the protagonists. To know this



it seemed necessary to the writer to know something of the background of the authors whose experiences, real or vicarious might influence their writing, as well as, to know the background of the protagonists to whom the feeling of the authors were projected.

Through Richard Wright's acknowledgement of his actual experiences as a youth in Mississippi, contacts with the white folk in the deep South, and as a product of a broken home, the writer has shown how fear affected the life of his protagonist, Bigger Thomas.

Though the experiences of Ann Petry and Willard Motley were vicarious, they seemed as real as those of Wright's. Ann Petry obtained her experience as a reporter for newspapers; whereas, Motley gained his experience through travel.

Research reveals that the late thirties and early forties were days of depression when our social and economic lives were threatened by poverty and distress. This condition caused insecurity, and insecurity caused frustration and fear. It was during this period that Bigger Thomas, Lutie Johnson, and Nick Romano were born. The writer has attempted to show that the main cause for fear in each of these protagonists was the lack of security; the ambition to have

freedom, opportunity, and, therefore, happiness. In the portrayal of human character and personality through the protagonists the writer found the effects of fear, both physical and mental, were many. Among the variety of effects which the writer has given in her thesis as symbols of fear are trembling, pounding of the heart, nervous perspiration and cold sweat, sleeplessness, dryness of the throat and mouth, extreme muscular tension and unable to remember what happened. The most subtle effect of fear lies in the fact that these integrating emotions, in a large degree, furnish the stimulus to action. The outstanding condition menacing the mental health of each of the protagonists is a sense of insecurity which caused fear. Fear which destroys personality is a factor in determining mental action.

The writer has shown that fear in each of the protagonist determined the mental action which destroyed them.

The first protagonist, Bigger Thomas, represents five facets of the southern Negro in his social and economic environment as Wright actually knew them. In the one character, Bigger Thomas, is a combination of the facets which produced a



Bigger whose environment influenced him and fear became so overwhelming that his crime caused him to be electrocuted at the age of twelve.

The second protagonist, Lutie Johnson, was created out of the vicarious experiences of Ann Petry. The fact that Lutie, a Negro woman whose economic condition was very poor, was placed on a dirty narrow street in Harlem, where the forces of evil disintegrate human personality, shows how ineffectual such attempts can be when pitted against relentless forces of environment. Even though she tried to make an honest living for herself and her son, Bub, she was overcome with frustration and fear which caused her to commit a crime, murder.

The third and last protagonist, Nick Romano, an Italian representing another minority group of America, was nurtured in the home of his parents and, in his early childhood was an altar boy who, at the age of twelve, was destined to become a priest. Misfortune came into the family and the sudden shock from a life of plenty to that of poverty was too much for Nick. Thus, a very sensitive boy who was destined to become a priest became a shameless criminal and died in the electric chair at the age of twenty-one.

The motivating influence in the life of each of these characters was the desire for financial security. The environmental forces, poverty, economic depression, neglect and segregation, were so great, however, that the characters found only frustration, fear and ultimate unhappiness.

Because of the social and economic situations which were thrust upon the protagonists, Bigger Thomas, Lutie Johnson, and Nick Romano, such an undesirable environment was created that all the negative forces of unhappiness seemed to work against them. Fear and hate became ultimate factors in the lives of these characters and caused them to act as they did.

Fear will cause individuals to behave in various ways. On many persons the influences of fear are more serious in their effect that the worst form of malady.

Certainly, in the characters, Bigger Thomas, Lutie Johnson, and Nick Romano, the data given in this study support this concept of fear as a predominant factor that motivates the concept of fear as a predominant factor that motivates the individual in various behavioral patterns that have their expressions in actions that involve the characters in acts of crime and violence. Data



proved that background and societal influences created those fears from which stem not only characteristics but outcomes as were revealed in the lives of Bigger Thomas, Lutie Johnson and Nick Romano

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